

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Great Smoky Mountains Visitor Numbers

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

For the fourth time in 80 years, Great Smoky Mountains National Park had over ten million annual visitors in a single year. In 2014, 10,099,275 visitors visited the park, an 8% increase over 2013. The other years when visitation topped ten million were 1987, 1999, 2000.

These numbers are good news for a lot of folks. They give the National Park Service something to cheer about and they demonstrate the park's economic power, as more visitors means more people spending money in the communities around the park. They also come as the Forest Service has recently identified an increasing population as one of the growing threats to southern Appalachian forests. In one aspect, that threat is the loss of forest land to development, but another aspect that has to be considered by landowners is the impact of more forest visitors on the places they visit, and the quality of those visits. How much peace is there to be found on a hike when you are continuously meeting people on the trail. How much wear and tear can that trail take, before it starts to seriously erode and become a water quality problem in a nearby stream. The trick remains providing folks with the outdoor experiences they seek, without harming the natural resource that draws them in the first place.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.